Engaging policymakers: A perspective from Washington State

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Two aspects of engagement

- Organizational structure and purpose
- Use of benefit-cost analysis
Structure

Created by the 1982 Washington State Legislature

- Explicitly nonpartisan staff
- Administered by The Evergreen State College
- Bipartisan Board of Directors includes:
  - 4 legislative members from Senate
  - 4 legislative members from House of Representatives
  - 2 nonpartisan staff directors
  - 2 executive branch representatives
  - 4 leaders of higher education institutions
Purpose

Produce practical research for the legislature

- Answer questions like:
  - What do other states do? How does Washington compare?
  - What works?
  - What’s the potential return on investment?

- Follow academic standards
- Write for a lay audience
Assignments to produce evidence

What works? (and what does not?)

a) Produce new evidence
   ✓ Evaluate outcomes for participants in state programs

b) Synthesize existing evidence
   ✓ Meta-analyze research on specific programs
   ✓ What is the potential return on investment?
What is the return on investment?

WSIPP’s benefit-cost analysis

✓ Standardized approach
✓ Use results from a meta-analysis (or outcome evaluation)
  • How much change can we expect?
✓ Apply consistent valuation of outcomes, e.g.,
✓ Estimate cost of program per-participant ($1,394)
✓ On average, $7,424 in net benefits
✓ Consider risk of each investment
  • How likely to “break even”? (>99%)
Where to find our results
Where to find our results

Washington State Institute for Public Policy

WSIPP’s mission is to carry out practical, non-partisan research—at legislative direction—on issues of importance to Washington State.

Washington State Institute for Public Policy

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) is a nonpartisan public research group located in Olympia, the hub of Washington State government. WSIPP is a team of multidisciplinary researchers who conduct applied policy research for the state legislature in a creative and collaborative environment.

WSIPP is strongly committed to the core values of nonpartisanship, quality, and impartiality. Created in 1983, WSIPP has become nationally and internationally recognized for the design, depth, and quality of its research reports and benefit-cost analyses.